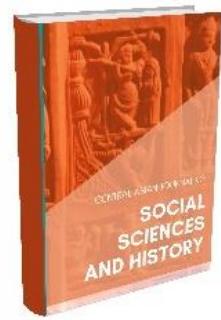




CENTRAL ASIAN JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES AND HISTORY

Journal homepage: <https://cajssh.centralasianstudies.org>



Historicizing the Phenomena of Militancy and the Re-Emergence of Economic Crimes in the Post-Amnesty Niger Delta

Michael, Thomas Blessed, Ph.D

Department of History and Diplomatic Studies Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Rumuolumeni
P.M.B 5047 Port Harcourt
michaelthomasblessed@yahoo.com

Osaih Rufus, Ph.D

Department of History and Diplomatic Studies, Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Rumuolumeni,
Port Harcourt
rufydad@gmail.com

Abstract:

This research analysed the post-amnesty Niger Delta area and its current state in relation to militancy, small guns and light weapons, and the reappearance of economic crimes. A historical excursus was undertaken to identify its origins, sources, and proliferations of arms and plethora of unwholesome activities in the region. Primary and secondary sources were used in this study to complete the historical research methodology. Secondary source analysis and primary sources synthesis served as the background for this process. The study established that Europeans freely supplied guns to encourage Niger Delta people to embark on slave raids and other economic crimes during the Atlantic trade era. The crude oil economy accentuated its complexity and sophistication. The findings of the study revealed that the proliferation of light weapons and the return of economic crimes in recent years have become commonplace and constitute serious threats to the lives of people, the peace of the region, and its economic growth. The study further revealed that militancy, small guns, and economic crimes had persisted for decades.

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 22-Apr-23

Received in revised form 20-Apr-23

Accepted 23-May-23

Available online 24-June-2023

Key word: Small and light, militancy, proliferation of arms, Niger Delta, Economic crimes.

The study also found that eradicating militancy, stopping the spread of weapons, and preventing economic crimes all need substantial investments in human capital. In order to reduce the prevalence of militancy, the spread of small arms and light weapons, and the resurgence of economic crimes in the Niger Delta, the study recommended that the Federal government and oil companies should collaborate with host communities to invest in the region's economic and social development.

Introduction

Niger Delta people operated a simple indigenous economy of farming, fishing and trading in the pre-colonial times. The pre-colonial man was a hard worker; cultivated, fished, traded and bartered or sold his products to eke out a living. This is why economics from age past and even now has always been the study of how man earns his daily bread, confirming the economic mind of man's efforts through ages or centuries towards the provisions of and satisfaction of his material needs, want and sustainability of his material progress and development (Osaih, et al, 2019, p. 93). This was the major reason why different scholars like Ake (1981), Hopkins (1973), Austen (1987) and Zeleza (1993) have proved beyond reasonable doubt that economic factors conditioned and determined the superstructure of any society. They also opined that economic factor is the primary reason for inter-group relations. Scholars like Alagoa (1970, 1971) and Ikime (1977) stated that social relations in Niger Delta were hinged on interdependence. Inter-group relations rested on the axiom that no society or world economy was autarkical (a Greek terminology connoting self-sufficiency). Jones (1965) averred that neither the Eastern Delta nor their hinterlands were self-sufficient in their economy. Michael (2016) further opined that economic needs are the bases for the intergroup relations and until such needs are met, other aspects of human interactions cannot be sustained. Hence, the interactions between the coastal and upland dwellers of the Niger Delta region will continue unabated.

Geographical and ecological variations led to the production of diverse crops as to satisfy local needs. This essentially led to mutual aid as people cooperate not just for the sake of social community but indeed out of necessity (Samuel, 2011, p. 63). When the need for local commerce could not satisfy the needs of the expanding population and the innate desire to grow led to the emergence of internal long distance trade. This was basically because of natural endowments and complimentary. To overcome the insecurity of head-hunters, pirates, kidnappers, marauders, brigand etc., vitiated with internal long distance commerce, traders secured the helps of the brave, bi-linguists, armed themselves with wooden clubs for less dangerous journey while spear for dangerous journeys and sometimes traveled in groups in order to ward off attackers (Osaih, 2020, p. 60). The movement of people, commodities, services, and ideas out of and into the Niger Delta region relied on human porter ship along the narrow bush portions or forest regions and boats (Ajayi and Alagoa, 1980, p. 229). Dike elaborated by arguing that cultural interactions, the flow of ideas, and the mixing of peoples are nearly always present when trading goods (Dike, 1956, p. 5). This, in turn, has often led to political problems and conflicts.

History of Militancy in the Niger Delta

Militancy came into the region as a reaction to a long history of exploitation by people external to sequestrate the resources of the autochthonous Niger Delta peoples. According to Ogbogbo (2018), it was the military defense of the Niger Delta patriots that made heroes of the likes of Jaja of Opobo, Nana Olomu of Itsekiri, Nwabuzo Iyogolo of Ogwashi-Uku, King Koko of Brass, Ovonramwen Nogbaisi of Benin, Nwaorisa of Ogbele, Akalisuo of Engenni and a host of other distinguished patriots and selfless leaders. The multinational oil corporations and the deliberate neglect and

underdevelopment of the region by successive government at the centre assumed the new phase of the old struggle. The resource curse thesis and the culture of poverty made some youths to take up arms against the federal government demanding for equal treatment, development, true and fiscal federalism and resource control. Some scholars said that militancy was purely a style of politics of criminality and a sheer welter of self-centred groups, gangs and cults. According to General Muhammadu Buhari, a retired military officer and President of Nigeria said as follows:

Everyone in Nigeria who cares about the truth will find out. Several governors actively sought to get elected. These young men were recruited and armed for use in the conflict with the opposition. After their decisive triumph, they were unable to reclaim the weapons and ceased compensating the men who had helped them. The kidnappings grew routine as angry youngsters took to the streets. A young man between the ages of 18 and 20 was being held for a ransom of \$500 every week. Why shouldn't he just do it? The question is why he would spend 20 years in education just to return to work for minimum wage (www.SaharaReporters.com/Nigerdelta) after all that time and effort.

President Buhari's assessment on the origins of violence in the Niger Delta is consistent with widespread knowledge of the subject. Extensive research and analysis has revealed that the oil producing population's militancy is caused by decades of criminal neglect, exploitation, political dominance, economic marginalisation, environmental degradation, dissatisfaction with the country's system of social production and reproduction, underdevelopment, and sub-human living conditions like poverty, hunger, malnutrition, ignorance, a lack of decent clothing and housing, and the prevalence of disease. Historically, it was a reaction in form of non-violence only involving petitions, sending of community delegations to multinational oil corporations and to the state, litigations, occasional demonstrations, boycotts, blockades, seizure of company properties, stoppage of work etc.

This resistance movement graduated, which led to the emergence of plethora of armed youth groups (gangs and cults), who believed in the diplomacy of the guns more than palliative syndrome, cosmetic promises of empty government rhetoric and failed intervention programmes, where riches are recycled among the political and economic classes.

They are gangs and criminal syndicates, known as cults or confraternities in Nigeria, fighting for an equitable distribution of the country's oil wealth. These groups include the Niger Delta Peoples' Volunteer Force (NDPVF), the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), the Niger Delta Vigilante Force (NDVF), the Supreme Egbesu Assembly, the Egbesu Confraternity, the Germans, and the Iceland. The vibrant history of weapons and gangs in the delta is reflected in all of them.

The NDPVF invested over N43.3 million to acquire small arms and light weapons ten years ago and its arrow-head, Alhaji Mujahid Asari-Dokubo, publicly declared the first cache of arms of the group and that the group has been on an open credit facility and it was estimated in Nigerian that about 1.6 million illicit small arms in the hands of civilians and other organized group in stock piles (Eddy, 2010). Some of these weapons entered into Nigeria because of the porous sea borders (Maigatari, Nguru, etc) and sea routes. Asari Dokubo, speaking to reporters in 2005, acknowledged this approach by saying, "we are very close to international waters and it's very easy to get weapons from ships!" Attacks against law enforcement and military facilities can provide a source of firearms. During these sudden strikes, terrorists often break into armouries and steal significant quantities of weapons and ammunition.

Examples include the Mini-Okoro Elelenwo, an assault on a police station the night before the April 14, 2015, Governorship and House Assembly Election, and an attack on the police headquarters in Yenagoa. Two police officers were killed in these instances. In war zones like Sierra Leone, Liberia, Sudan, Somalia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, etc., corrupt security officials and those released from peacekeeping operations sell weapons to terrorists and ethnic chauvinists. Many of the weapons were smuggled over the Sahara from nations in Africa including Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Cameroon, Chad, Niger, and the Benin Republic, among others, in a shipment of charcoal. South African arms dealers have sourced weapons from countries like Ukraine, Russia, Turkey, Indonesia, the United States, Germany, Belgium, Serbia, the Czech Republic, China, and others. Illegal dealers and vendors (both domestic and foreign) such as Henry Okah, Renal Akhmurow, Leonid Minin, and Eli Calil provide firearms such as the German G3, the Russian Ak-47, the Belgian FN-FAL, the Czech machine gun, and the Serbian RPG (Von Kemedi, 2008, p. 196; Asuk, 2013, p. 253).

The southern town of Awka, the capital of Anambra state, has gained notoriety in the production of locally-made assorted, small guns called Awka-made and there are pocket of places in Nigeria where small arms are manufactured. The insurgents' ability to get small guns and light weapons from across the continent has been bolstered and maintained by illegal oil bunkering in the Niger Delta and euphemism in the oil business for big volume oil theft. The illegal bunkering of oil has been a major factor in the spread of small guns and light weapons. For the purpose of rapacious ransacking and hustling for pipelines from which to pilfer oil, the elite class and the illegal oil tycoons who dominate the illegal business provide gangs, criminal groups, and militias with weapons and pay them handsomely to act as armed guards as they sail along international waterways and bunkering routes. Some have blamed the leftover weaponry from the Nigerian Civil War of 1967–1970 for the country's small arms and light weapon issue. Patrick Oraeke said that many small weaponry used during the conflict, particularly on the rebel Biafran side, were not collected until the conclusion of fighting.

According to my informant, the alarming rate of robberies, criminality, violent crisis and banditry was an aftermath of the civil war. The inability of some die-hard militants to voluntarily return their light weapons have constituted a force for relapse into fresh armed violence, kidnapping, hostage-taking and criminality in the Niger Delta Regions (Eddy, 2010).

Asuk (2013, p. 252) pointed out that, there existed a profound nexus between oil theft, proliferation of illegal arms, social conflicts and violence in the Niger Delta. The waves of objectionable kidnapping in Ogbia/Egbema/Ndoni Local Government area from 2011-2015 after the amnesty declaration and other interventionist agencies is still a pin-pointer that peace is an illusion in the Niger Delta region. Scholars from the liberal angles have asserted that small arms causes development failures or internal conflicts while others at variance with the above, declared that such assertion is not only faulty, a-historical but also a fallacy of misplaced concreteness. They opined that small arms whether nearly introduced or in circulation before, constituted important risk factor that exacerbate pre-existing inequalities among the vulnerable groups. The government and non-state actors' efforts to limit the prevalence of small guns and light weapons in Nigeria have not been particularly successful. There are insufficient data to provide context for the prevalence of light weapons in Nigeria. Small arms and light weaponry have been more widely available in Orashi and the Niger Delta as a result of recent bizarre events. My informants testified that the recent election of March and April, 2015, PDP politicians empowered Rivers youths with guns to kill or lynch any opposition members who posed threats to their political victory. It was worst in Ogbia/Egbema/ Ndoni and Ahoada axes.

Historicizing Small Arms in the Niger Delta Region

Before the economic trade for guns between the Niger Delta personalities and the Europeans in the Atlantic era, the Niger Delta communities had mastered their environment and put their mastery into practice by devising tools of indigenous technologies to guard against their surroundings internally and externally. The ascension of slave trade into the political economy of the Niger Delta in the 15th century originated arms race, militia recruitment and formation of alliances to excel another in the pursuit of their conflicting economic and commercial interests. As the European guns arrived in large numbers, conflicts were encouraged and the arrival of guns intensified existing rivalries. The legitimate trade heightened the arms race, diplomatic and military squabbles over limited economic resources in the Niger Delta fanned the embers of wars. And during the crude oil economy, the arms race phenomenon and military engagements among groups assumed volatile and unconscionable dimensions due to the internationalization of the region's oil theft (bunkering), smuggling and the liberalization of legal and illegal markets for arms (Asuk, 2018, p. 90).

The slave trade instigated slave raids, warfare, banditry and kidnapping for the supply of slaves (Osaih, 2020, p. 148) and men were recruited in different canoe houses to engage in warfare. The European super-cargoes supplied arms to Niger Delta kings and traders which were used for the hustle for slaves. Wars and rivalries were centred on the diplomatic and military competition to gain and maintain control over trade, trade routes and economic resources and these were the factors that underpinned the climax of arms race for the procurement of lethal weapons of warfare and the build of large armies. The inception of crude oil economy as the centerpiece of Nigerian political economy led to the conquest and marginalization of the Niger Delta through the strengthening of oil laws and the institutional monopoly of violence and praxis of prebendalism, which reflects the nature of an arbitrary Nigerian state and its accumulative bid exercised by the ethno-regional political class. This class was only bent on remedying its economic limitations to the expense of the Niger Delta whose unsustainable oil exploitation created environmental crises which destroyed local livelihoods, aggravated penury and alienation.

The struggle for oil wealth among the commercial and political classes generated violent conflicts that degenerated into the Nigerian Civil War. The war led to the diplomacy of arms race and internationalization of the Nigerian-Biafran War of 1967-1970 as both divides were never self-reliant in ammunitions, finances and soldiers (Enemugwem, 2021, p. 97). It was the pursuit of resource control and justice that crested the imprint of a revolutionary icon, Major Isaac Jasper Adaka Boro in his *Twelve Day Revolution, 1982*. According to Aghalino and Odeh (2018), the resurgence of economic crimes can be traced back to the marginalisation of the Niger Delta, the unfair distribution of oil mining licences to residents of non-oil producing areas, the harassment of officials and associates of former Nigerian president Goodluck Ebele Jonathan's administration, and the unfreezing of the accounts of ex-militant leader Government Ekpemupolo (Tompolo). The embers for the resuscitation of conflicts and shadow economic activities in the Niger Delta were fanned by administrative neglect, social deprivation, environmental pollution, the scrapping of the Maritime University at Okerenkoko, and the undisguised discontent of the President Mohammed Buhari's administration and scourge of poverty. This created a perfect storm that shattered the region's peace, security, and prosperity by giving rise to an unparalleled proliferation of armaments, competing organisations, and the liberalisation of illegal markets for the procurement of guns.

This culture of arms race by competing and rival groups in the pre-colonial era has transcended to the contemporary time where small arms and light weapons are dominant tools of criminal violence, kidnapping for ransom, insecurity, instability, sexual violence on women and threat to development. The proliferation of arms constitute into conflict in two ways, namely: increase in sophisticated firepower causes high level of carnage and the augmentation of lethal weaponry creates a vicious circle whereby competing militant gangs and rival cult groups engaged in arms race of sorts to gain greater dominance in capability and superiority (Okolie-Osemene and Aghalino, 2013, pp. 369-371). The proliferation and the usage of arms against one cult group to another paralyzed the economy of some communities in the Niger Delta. Kidnapping for ransom and general insecurity from rampaging cult groups inhibited people's access to social services from government and oil multinationals as people flee to become fugitives in their own localities and had to sleep in churches to evade being a victim of kidnappers. Socio-economic development became a mirage as poverty, hunger, insecurity and fear pervaded some communities in Orashi region and Niger Delta at large. Traditional leadership and youth activities collapsed. The citizens lost their lives and hope in the ability of government, police and military to protect them.

In pre-colonial era, wars were not fought with much lethality, sophistication and deadliness because of the consequences of reprisal especially the capital punishment that awaits the offender. The warriors that engaged in wars mostly fought with bows and arrows, daggers, spears, charms, dane-guns and other hand-made weapons. The traditional warfare style was what Ejituwu and Okororafor (2008, p. 49) called limited warfare because it was dictated by a deliberate downgrading of weapons in war due to closeness of blood relations. Alagoa (2004, p.105) opined that among the Ijo people of the Niger Delta, weapons were used to enforce deterrence as fratricidal wars were fought not for the purpose of annihilation or to win total victory. This was what was in the minds of Major General Yakubu Gowon and Asika when they declared at the end of the Nigerian-Biafran, war "no victor, no vanquish".

The advent of European traders and colonialism into the soil of the Niger Delta communities revolutionized and shifted local warfare to large scale dimensions of arms race for military beef off, gun-boat diplomacy, bombardments, deposition, deportation and death. Violence and lawlessness became the recurring decimal as Niger Delta kings, capitalists and warriors accessed sophisticated weapons from the European merchants to beef up their individual and community armories for the purposes of raiding, defense, trade, and warfare. Okorobia (2013, p. 92) averred that firearms were more lethal than the traditional instruments of violence. Ejituwu and Okoroafor (2008, p. 47) opined that Europeans freely supplied them with guns, rums etc. to encourage them to raid on other local people. These perceived advantage of these Niger Delta kings and communities prompted other communities like Kalabari, Bonny, Okrika, Opobo, Nembe, Itsekiri etc., to get into the new trade in the spirit of intense competition and military rivalry and the war-canoe became a veritable trading co-operation with self-development capabilities on which personal activities became the intense competition and brutal rivalry; a reflection of the major issue in Europe, with a spill over into the Niger Delta. The eager accomplices in the Niger Delta—"a horde of agents (local chieftains), who were driven by cruelty, greed and naivety allied with European merchants to unleash collective pillage on individuals, coastal and hinterland communities that were recalcitrant, unswerving and untamed.

This made the Niger Delta a "theatre of rivalry". This marked the evolution of gun culture, intense skirmish, bloody rivalries and wars in the Niger Delta. These wars for oil (oil wars) in the Niger Delta, however, the availability of guns did not churned out rapid proliferation of arms as access to guns was limited and only the kingpins, influential traders and notorious warriors could afford to own them.

Barinem (2010, p. 137) noted that, "this knowledge of and access to guns greatly influenced and produced a generational culture that was imbued with a sociology of violence which has shaped the behavior of the Niger Delta socio-economic and political relationship to this day". This passage has enhanced our understanding of the devastating effects of the current surge of violence in the area, which is being driven by the spread of small guns and light weapons. We'd want to elaborate a little on what small arms and light weapons are in order to better grasp the notion of this common discourse.

The term "small arms and light weapons" has no universally accepted meaning. Weapons classified as "small arms and light" encompass anything from pistols to man-portable air defense systems. Small arms and light weapons are synonymous, according to Lieutenant Colonel Kingsley (18 August 2015). This is a word from arms control protocol that distinguishes between two broad categories of weaponry. Light weapons encompass a wide variety of medium calibre and explosive ordinance, such as man portable and vehicle mounted anti-personnel and anti-tanks rockets, while small arms refer to hand-held, small calibre firearms like handguns, rifles, semi-automatic and fully automatic weapons, and man-portable machine guns. Revolvers, submachine guns, self-loading pistols, carbines, machine guns, mortars, rocket-launchers, grenade-launchers, and portable launchers of anti-tank missile and rocket systems are all examples of small arms and light weapons. Infantry teams often use light weapons since they are heavier and bigger than small arms (Akuyoma, 2003, p. 120). Heavy machine guns, automatic cannons, howitzers, mortars under 100mm calibre, recoilless guns, shoulder launched rockets, anti-aircraft weapons, launchers, and air defense weapons are all examples of portable weaponry intended for use by multiple people working as a crew. Machine pistols, fully automatic rifles, assault rifles, and semi-automatic rifles are all considered small arms (Barinem, 2010, p. 140).

Some of the distinguishing features of small arms and light weapon are that, they are relatively cheap, affordable, transportable, concealable, maintainable, useable by untrained civilians or children and easy to smuggle to conflict-ridden areas. When used indiscriminately, individual or small groups of persons can cause heavy carnage among civilian population. Overpopulation of small arms and light weapons (SALW) in the Niger Delta region dates back to at least 1999. According to Eddy (2010, p. 61), the weapons on display included AK-47 assault rifles, revolvers, self-loading pistols, heavy machine guns, shoulder fire rockets (also known as bazookas), grenade launchers (both hand-held and mounted), light anti-tank missiles, light mortars, shoulder-held and fire-aircraft missiles, and hand-placed landmines. The former Nigerian president's response to the widespread availability of firearms was, "Good luck." Ebele Jonathan, speaking at a conference on nuclear non-proliferation (The Guardian, 12 April, 2010), called worldwide attention to the threat posed by small arms and light weapons to national security in Africa.

Militancy in the Niger Delta has resulted in loss of life, destruction of national economic assets, huge losses in crude oil production and export, serious threat to Niger Delta residents, security of the Nigerian state, increased criminality and violent conflicts, halted economic activities and induced displacement of people, and posed a massive impediment to effective governance and the peaceful transformation of the region. Militant action caused panic and slowed the country's economic development. Businesses were paralyzed as multinational oil and gas firms closed up while the expatriates, the targets of the militants took flight in droves in a bid to evade rampaging kidnappers. In January, 2009, when the scourge of militancy attained its zenith, Nigeria's economy was brought on its knees, literally bleeding from persistent punctures suffered from serial and constant attacks on pipelines and other costly facilities (Amnesty News, 2009, p. 4).

Amnesty Programme and the Re-emergence of Economic Crimes in the Post-Amnesty Niger Delta

As a result of exploitation, oil-based environmental degradation, ineffective government policies and programmes, and pipeline vandalism in the Niger Delta region, angry young people resorted to a variety of revolutionary pressures, attacks on oil companies and their installations, kidnapping of expatriate staff of oil workers and political kingpins, and oil bunkering activities between 1996 and 2007. The national economy collapsed as a result of these militia violent patterns, and the country's ability to generate foreign currency came to a grinding stop. After the physical force, carrot-and-stick, and institutionalism strategies had failed miserably, the Nigerian government realised the Niger Delta was no simple puzzle. Former Nigerian President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua included a solution to the Niger Delta conflict as one of the seven items in his "Seven Point Agenda" in 2007. In September 2008, Nigeria's number one citizen, under the direction of Ledum Mitee, formed a 45-person technical committee to identify a long-term solution to the Niger Delta crisis (Obulor, 2013).

The committee strongly that the president grant amnesty to the extremists. The insurgents were given amnesty on June 25, 2009, and the period of its implementation was from August 6th to October 14th of the same year. The amnesty encouraged those who were prepared to disarm and abandon their violent ways. A total of 8,299 reformed militants turned up 2,760 high-tech weapons of varying calibres and 287,445 rounds of weaponry and ammunition to the committee on amnesty and disarmament formed by former president Musa Yar'adua (Israel, 2010, p.154). Leaders of the militant group and many of its supporters accepted amnesty and disarmed before the deadline passed. For example, Ateke Tom, the leader of the Niger Delta Vigilante Movement (NDVM), Farah Dagogo, the leader of the Niger Delta Strike Force (NDSF), Soboma George, the leader of the outlaws, and Government Ekpemupolo alias Tompolo, the fearless leader of Camp Five, all renounced militancy after receiving amnesty, as reported by Obulor (2013). This deal ushered in gradual return of peace and tranquility in the troubled and volatile region of the Niger Delta.

From assessment by the radical scholars, amnesty was a short time programme for relative peace. Four months later, over 14,000 persons out of the 30,000 who enlisted in the amnesty programme were deployed to various universities and vocational training centres within the country and offshore, began to say the government have abandoned them as salaries were not paid and budget proposal for the amnesty programme was not released (*ibid*, p. 154). The fragile peace won by diplomacy and managed through peaceful agreements failed because of the proliferation of small arms and light weapons and arms trading by criminal gangs (Eddy, 2010, p. 125).

Surprisingly, hardly had the relative peace lasted, when the re-emergence of economic crimes became evident in the Niger Delta region. Piracy, pipeline vandalization, crude oil theft, attacks on oil installations, illegal refining of oil and kidnapping for ransom were/are lucrative businesses in the post-amnesty Niger Delta that posed serious threat to development of the region. The resurgence of economic crimes and sabotage had far-reaching consequences for the economy of the region and by implication, the economy of Nigeria and by extension the world economy since any little fissure, dislocation and bureaucratic bottleneck in the oil industry in the region has grave impact on the world energy market (Business Day Tuesday 10, November, 2009). Businesses in the Niger Delta were paralyzed as multinational oil and gas firms closed up while the expatriates, the targets of the militants took flight in droves in a bid to evade rampaging kidnappers. January 2009, when the scourge of armed militancy attained its peak, Nigeria's economy was brought on its knees, literally bleeding from persistent punctures suffered from serial attacks on pipelines and costly facilities (Amnesty, News,

2009, p. 4).

Crude oil theft is an illegal business for the influential and the mighty oil barons and petrocrats in the country and the perpetrators of illegal bunkering load the crude into plastic drums and transport them in wooden boats to their destinations in the high seas where they sell the crude to waiting oil tankers either in cash or in exchange for arms. Apart from oil bunkering, kidnapping for ransom was a serious and real time business. From 2015-2018, Don Wanni of Ogbia, Igbudu of Ahoada and Kill and Bury of Odual (Kugbo) and their boys were serious threats to the Orashi society and the economy. No part of Rivers State was immune from kidnapping and display of cult activities. There were countless loss of lives among rival cult groups and innocent people. East-west road in Port Harcourt was also a no-go-area within this period as Ndele boys terrorized passengers and drivers. Road users diverted to Big Elele for the safety of their lives. This tensed situations put everyone in jeopardy as politicians, business men and women, the rich men and women and their mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters and relations of the rich were victims of kidnapping in the Niger Delta region.

Conclusion

It is a truism that the Niger Delta region is awash with lethal weaponry in the hands of militants, cult groups, criminals and kidnappers. The proliferation of arms is caused by several factors. Arms proliferations in Niger Delta region refers to undue increase in the numbers of arms and weapons, which has been the dominant tool of militants for criminal violence, bunkering, kidnapping for ransom and sexual assault on women. The phenomenon of small arms and light weapons has posed serious threats to the socio-economic development of the Niger Delta except intervention is taking in terms of making laws against kidnapping, oil theft and militancy more effective. It is very imperative to restore cultural values at the family level and a proper re-orientation of the youths to prevent the repeat of such ugly incidences in our localities. Deficient normative values in the Niger Delta and the passive approaches to crimes and development needs of the Niger Delta people by the Nigerian state does not demonstrate the resolve to fight the scourge. With proper enlightenment and peace education, these bulging problems of kidnapping and bunkering would be put to a stop.

References

1. Aghalino, S. O. and Odeh, L. E. (2018). "Buhari Administration and the Resurgence of Petro-Violence in the Niger Delta", in Afaha, P. (2018) *Advocacy for History: A Festschrift in Honour of Prof. C. B. N. Ogbogbo*. Abuja: Command Publishers.
2. Ake, C. (1981). *The Political Economy of Africa*. London: Longman.
3. Akuyoma, C. (2003) "Small Arms and Light Weapons: Consensus Attempt to Restrain and Control Availability of Arms in Nigeria". Vol. 24, Nos. 5-6. May and June, Lagos. Nigeria Institute of International Affairs (NIIA).
4. Amnesty News, Vol. 1, No. 3, 2014. Published by Presidential Amnesty Office, a Quaterly Newsletter.
5. Asuk C. (2013). "The Rise and fall of the Niger Delta: Economic and Political Development AD 1500 – 2007". Unpublished PhD dissertation, Department of History and Diplomatic Studies, University of Port Harcourt.

6. Asuk, C. O. (2018). "Historicizing the Phenomenon of Arms Race in the Niger Delta". *Africolgy: The Journal of Pan-Africa Studies*, Vol. 12, No.2.
7. Barinem, B. D. (2010). "The Politics of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) Proliferation in the Niger Delta 1999 – 2007". M. A. Thesis, Department of History and Diplomatic studies, University of Port Harcourt. Nigeria.
8. Boro, I. J. I. (1982). *The Twelve-Day Revolution*. Benin City, Nigeria: Idodo Umeh Publishers.
9. Dike, k.o. (1956) *Trade and Politics in the Niger Delta, 1830-1885*. London: Oxford University Press.
10. Eddy, A. (2010). "Peace Building and Post-Amnesty Programme in the Niger Delta Region". *Icheke: Journal of the faculty of Humanities*. Vol. 8 Nos. 1 & 2. Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Rumuoumeni, Port Harcourt.
11. Eddy, A. (2010). "Small Arms Proliferation: Threat to Niger Delta Amnesty Programme". *Kiabara: Journal Humanities*. Vol. 16, No. 1 (pp. 61 -72).
12. Ejituwu, N. C. and Okoroafor, S. I. (2009). *The House of Skulls: A Symbol of Warfare and Diplomacy in Pre-colonial Niger Delta and Igbo Hinterland*. Port Harcourt: M & J Grand Orbit Communication Ltd.
13. Elem, M. (2012). "Peace for Development in the Niger Delta: Beyond Amnesty": *Icheke: Journal of the faculty of Humanities*, Vol. 10. No. 1 Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Port Harcourt.
14. Enemugwem, J. H. (2021). *An Outline History of Nigerian Civil War, 1967-1970*. Port Harcourt: Onyoma Research Publications.
15. Hopkins, A. G. (1973). *An Economic History of West Africa*. London: Longman.
16. Israel, N. J. (2010). "Amnesty and the Niger Delta Question in Nigeria: A Critical Appraisal". *Icheke: Journal of the faculty of Humanities*. Vol. 8 Nos. 1 and 2, Rivers State University of Education, Rumuolumini, Port Harcourt.
17. Lieutenant Col. Kingsley Ekpete is a military officer serving in the Nigerian Army. interviewed 18/8/2015.
18. Michael, T. B. (2016). "Odual and Her Neighbours: A Study of Inter-Group Relations in the Niger Delta from Pre-colonial Times to 2010". Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Port Harcourt.
19. Obular, I. (2013). *Political Economy of Ethnic Militias and Political Violence in Nigeria*. Port Harcourt: Kemuela Publications.
20. Ogbogbo, C. N. B. (2018). *In Defence of Tradition*. An Inaugural Lecture. University of Ibadan.
21. Okolie-Osemene, J. and Aghalino, S. O. (2013). "Small Arms and Light Weapons in Abia State" in Olawale, I. A. and Eselebor, W. A. (2013) *Managing Security in a Globalized World*. Nigeria: John Archers Publishers.
22. Okorobia, A. M. (2013). "Justice: The Missing Link to Peace and Development in the Niger Delta", in Derefaka, A. A. (ed.) *Journal of Niger Delta Studies*, Vol.3 No. 1 (pp. 91 – 117).

23. Osaih, R. (2007). "The Niger Delta Problems of Hostage-taking, Oil Theft and Military Insurgency and their recommended remedies". Being a term paper presented at the Department of History and Diplomatic Studies, University of Port Harcourt, Nigeria.
24. Osaih, R. (2019). "Orashi Intergroup Relations in the Pre-colonial Times with her Neighbours". *South-South Journal of Humanities & International Studies, Vol. 2, No. 3. Multi-Disciplinary Journal of the Faculty of Humanities*, Ignatius Ajuru University of Education. Port Harcourt.
25. Osaih, R. (2020). "A Military History of Orashi Region in Rivers State, A.D. 1500-1900". Unpublished PhD Thesis, Department of History and Diplomatic Studies. University of Port Harcourt.
26. The Guardian, April 12, 2010
27. www. Sahara reporter.com/nigerdelta